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Ernie Sosa is without doubt one of the towering intellectual figures of contemporary epistemology. Indeed, it is difficult to think of an area of epistemology where he has not made a distinctive and highly influential contribution. Moreover, I think it is fair to say—and this is the real mark of one of the greats—that the way younger epistemologists like myself instinctively approach epistemological topics is largely informed by his contribution to the subject. Sosa's new book, *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge*, the first of two volumes, covers many of the issues in epistemology that his work is associated with, and I am delighted to be able to comment on this book here.[1] Given the breadth of topics covered in this work—from the nature of dreams, to intuitions and the problem of the criterion—I will not try to offer a critique of the book as a whole. Instead, I want to focus on one key thread, which is the important contribution that Sosa makes to the debate regarding epistemic value by appeal to a central notion in his work, that of apt performance.

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Sosa's central idea is that the value of knowledge is not to be understood solely in terms of the value of cognitive success (i.e., true belief), but also in terms of the right relationship obtaining between the agent's relevant cognitive ability and the

[1] Sosa (2007). All page references given in the text are to this book.

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target cognitive success. In this way, argues Sosa, we can avoid a central problem in epistemology concerning the value of knowledge. For if that value is to be understood purely in terms of instrumental epistemic value relative to the good of cognitive success, then it seems that the epistemic value of knowledge is (somehow) composed of the epistemic value of cognitive success and the instrumental epistemic value contributed by the way that the cognitive success was produced in a truth-conducive fashion.[2] If that is right, however, then it is hard to see why knowledge should be of more epistemic value than mere true belief. After all, that a certain good is produced in a fashion that would normally produce that good does not usually contribute additional value. To illustrate this point, just consider the fact that a cup of coffee that was produced by a reliable coffee-making machine (i.e., one which regularly produces good coffee) is no more valuable than a second cup of coffee which is identical to the first in all the relevant respects (taste, smell, quantity, appearance, etc.,) but which was produced by an unreliable machine.[3]

But suppose now that the specific value of knowledge is a non-instrumental value that arises out of the relationship between the cognitive ability and the cognitive success as Sosa supposes (we will consider what this relationship is in a moment)? There is nothing mysterious about this, since there are clear precedents for non-instrumental—i.e., *final*—value arising out of the relational (rather than the intrinsic) properties of the relevant object. The first book published on the first ever printing press is valuable in this way, for example, not because of its intrinsic properties—an exact replica which shares all the relevant intrinsic properties will clearly be of less value, including less non-instrumental value—but precisely because of its relational properties; specifically, because of how it was produced. Cups of coffee are not valuable in this fashion, since the way they are produced does not seem to contribute final value, but perhaps the value of a cognitive success when it is knowledge is valuable in this manner—perhaps the way that the cognitive success is produced when it is knowledge accrues it a distinctive value. This is the possibility that Sosa explores. If he is right, then the specific value problem for knowledge just described evaporates, since the distinctive value of a cognitive success that qualifies as knowledge when compared with a mere cognitive success is captured in terms of the final value of that cognitive success due to its relational properties, and is not simply a function of the instrumental epistemic value of cognitive success.[4]

[2] I say 'somehow' because it is an open question how the component values are combined in knowledge to create the overall value of knowledge. Ordinarily at least, one cannot simply add values together to find their sum.

[3] In essence, this is the 'swamping' problem much discussed in the contemporary literature. For discussion, see especially Kvanvig (2003), who attributes the problem to Swinburne (1999; 2000). See also Zagzebski (2003). For scepticism about the 'coffee cup' case, see Goldman and Olsson (forthcoming). I critically discuss the swamping problem at length in Pritchard (*forthcomingc*).

[4] Note that, as far as I am aware, Sosa never himself describes this value as final non-intrinsic value, though I take it from what he does say about this type of value that it is uncontroversial to describe his view in these terms. For more discussion of final non-intrinsic value, see Rabinowicz and Roennow-Rasmussen (1999; 2003). The general line of objection to the swamping argument just described can be found in an embryonic form in Percival (2003), and in a more explicit form in Brogaard (2007) and Pritchard (2008b). The first explicit statement of this line of objection that I'm aware of was in a talk that

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But how is cognitive success to be related to cognitive ability to confer this special kind of value? In short, Sosa's idea is that the cognitive success must be *because of* the cognitive ability. When this is satisfied—to put it in Sosa's terminology, when the belief is "accurate *because* adroit" (p. 79)—then the belief is "apt" and so qualifies as knowledge.[5] This is a compelling idea, since it does seem right that a special value enters the scene when, and only when, a success is because of ability. In particular, as Sosa points out, we value a mere success (such as a lucky hit with an arrow) or a skilful failure (such as a unfortunate miss with an arrow) very differently to a success that is the product of skill. Indeed, although this matter is a little complex as we will see in a moment, we also evaluate a success where skill is involved very differently if it can be shown that, nonetheless, the success is because of luck rather than due to the relevant skill (as in a Gettier-style case in which one's skilful attempt at hitting the target is successful, but ultimately because of luck rather than due to the skill in question). Moreover, Sosa is surely right that the difference in value that enters the scene when a success is because of ability includes final, non-intrinsic, value. That is, we value successes that are apt for their own sake on account of the way that the successes were produced.

Although Sosa does not put the point in quite this way, I think a useful way of characterising this thesis regarding apt performance and its distinctive value is in terms of the notion of an *achievement*. After all, a prerequisite of a success qualifying as an achievement is surely that the success be because of ability in the relevant way. Moreover, I think it is clear that achievements have the special kind of value that Sosa is interested in (at least with one or two qualifications). In particular, we value an achievement more than a mere success—and, specifically, a cognitive achievement (knowledge) more than a mere cognitive success—precisely because the success at issue in an achievement exhibits relational properties lacking in the mere success which suffice to confer final value on that success. In short, an achievement, but not a mere success, is valuable in its own right, and valuable in its own right precisely because of how it was produced.

I am very sympathetic to Sosa's proposal in this regard. Indeed, I wish it were true that a proposal of this sort could account for the distinctive value of knowledge,

Footnote 4 continued
Sosa gave at the *Virtue Epistemology* conference I ran with Michael Brady at the University of Stirling in 2004. For an overview of the recent literature on epistemic value, see Pritchard (2007c; 2007d).

[5] How is this 'because of' relation to be understood? Sosa does not say. The natural way to read it is in causal explanatory terms, such that the agent's adroitness is the best explanation of the agent's cognitive success, his accuracy. This is the type of reading that Greco (2007; forthcominga; forthcomingb) opts for in his virtue-theoretic account of the value of knowledge, which he derives from earlier work by Sosa, and in places Sosa seems to take this line himself (see, for example, p. 96, where Sosa diagnoses why knowledge is lacking in the Nogot case by explicitly appealing to the fact that the agent's adroitness does not explain the correctness of the target belief). It is clear from other things that Sosa says on this matter, however—and this has been confirmed to me in conversation—that his actual view is very different, and makes appeal to the idea of a *power*. It would take us too far afield to get into the subtleties of this issue here. For more discussion of the explanatory account of the 'because of' relation in this context, see Greco (2007; forthcominga; forthcomingb) and Pritchard (2008b; forthcominga).

since it would provide an elegant and compelling response to the problem of epistemic value described above. I am not convinced that it does work, however.

In particular, while I grant that apt performance more generally, and apt belief in particular, is indeed of final value in roughly the way just described, I don't agree that knowledge should be equated with apt belief. There are two fundamental problems with the idea that knowledge is apt belief. The first is that there seem to be clear-cut cases in which agents have apt beliefs and yet lack knowledge; the second is that there seem to be clear-cut cases in which agents have knowledge and yet lack apt beliefs. Accordingly, unless Sosa is to ally his view to a rather radical form of epistemic revisionism—thereby depriving the view of much of its attraction—he will need to abandon the thesis that knowledge is apt belief. In the next two sections I will explain the problems facing the view, and in the final section I will offer a diagnosis of where I think Sosa has gone wrong.

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I noted above that aptness can be undermined by luck, even when the agent is successful and the relevant skill is present. To illustrate this point, consider an archer skilfully firing at a target and hitting that target, but where the success in question is not because of the relevant skill but rather due to luck. Perhaps, for example, a freak gust of wind blows the arrow off-course, but that a second freak gust of wind happens to blow the arrow back on course again. Clearly, a success of this sort is not deserving of the special value we are interested in, and the right explanation of why seems to straightforwardly be that the success is not because of the relevant ability but simply down to luck. In short, the success in question does not constitute an achievement.

The same is also true in the epistemic case of course, in that the special epistemic value that we are interested in is absent when it comes to Gettierized true beliefs—i.e., skilfully formed true beliefs where the cognitive success in question is not because of cognitive ability but rather because of luck. As before, we can summarise this point by saying that the cognitive success in question does not constitute a cognitive achievement. So far, then, so good.

Notice, however, that there are two types of luck that are relevant for our purposes. The first is the Gettier-style luck just considered, where luck—to paraphrase Peter Unger (1968, 159)—'intervenes betwixt ability and success' and thereby ensures that the success is not because of the ability. It is not in question that luck of this sort is contrary to aptness, of either cognitive successes or successes more generally. The second type of luck is not of this intervening sort, however, but is rather what we might call 'environmental' luck. That is, like Gettier-style luck, it does ensure that the agent could very easily have not been successful, but, unlike Gettier-style luck, it does not ensure this by intervening between the ability and the success.

Consider again the archer case just described but where the two freak gusts of wind did not occur and so nothing intervened between the success and the ability. I think we would clearly say that this was in the relevant sense an apt success which accrues the distinctive kind of value that Sosa is interested in. Such a success is

clearly an achievement, for example. But notice now what happens if we factor-in environmental luck of the relevant sort. Suppose, for example, that the archer chose her target at random from a range of targets on the range but that, unbeknownst to her, all of the targets bar the one that she actually chose contain a forcefield that repels anything that goes near it. As with the Gettier-style case described above, then, in which two freak gusts of wind interfere with the shot, the agent could very easily have missed. Crucially, however, environmental luck of this sort seems to in no way undermine the aptness of the shot. Indeed, the agent's success in this case is no less of an achievement because of this environmental luck, even though the luck at issue in the Gettier-style case does prevent the success from being an achievement.

Apt successes—and thus achievements—are hence perfectly compatible with a certain kind of luck. More specifically, apt successes—and thus achievements—can obtain even though the agent could very easily have been unsuccessful (i.e., even though the achievement is *unsafe*). Interestingly, it seems clear that Sosa would be quite happy to endorse this conclusion, for he explicitly argues (pp. 81ff.) that achievements can be unsafe in this way. He writes:

> If the act is due to a competence exercised in its appropriate conditions, its success may be due to luck in various ways. It may be just an accident that the agent retains his relevant competence, for example, or that the conditions remain appropriate. Either way, the act fails to be *safely* successful, since it might too easily have failed, through lack of the required competence or conditions. It might still be apt, nevertheless, indeed attributably, creditably apt. (p. 81)

The problem, however, is that while it seems plausible to hold that achievements can be unsafe in this way, it does not seem plausible to hold that knowledge—i.e., on this view, specifically cognitive achievement—is compatible with the target belief being unsafe.

In order to see this point, consider a parallel case involving cognitive success. Suppose that we have an agent skilfully and successfully forming a belief that there is a barn in front of her. Suppose furthermore that luck does not intervene betwixt cognitive ability and cognitive success in this case (e.g., it is not that she isn't looking at a barn but rather a hologram of a barn, but that her belief is true nonetheless because there is real barn somehow obscured from view by the hologram barn). The belief so formed would surely then be an achievement and so would count as apt. But now add the following detail: suppose that our agent is, unbeknownst to her, in barn façade county where all the other barns in the vicinity are fakes, and that she could very easily have formed her belief that there is a barn in front of her by looking at one of these fake barns. Is the cognitive success still a cognitive achievement? Well, if the 'archer' case is anything to go by, environmental luck of this sort is entirely compatible with achievements, and so this case ought to qualify as a cognitive achievement, and hence as a case of apt belief. But is it a case of knowledge? Alas, it isn't, and the reason it isn't is that knowledge is of its nature *safe*—one cannot have knowledge and yet one's cognitive success be lucky in the sense that one could very easily have been

wrong.[6] Knowledge, then, is resistant to luck in a way that mere apt belief isn't, and hence we should be wary about identifying knowledge with apt belief.

There are, of course, moves that Sosa can make in response to this objection. One option could be to concede that knowledge and apt belief can sometimes come apart. Given that Sosa wishes to account for the special value of knowledge by appeal to the thesis that knowledge is apt belief, however, then this line of response is not going to work. Alternatively, a second option might be to claim that the belief in this case isn't apt, perhaps because the luck involved prevents it from being because of cognitive ability in the relevant way. But then the problem is to explain why the successful shot in the corresponding archery case seems so clearly to be apt. That is, the apt performance account of achievements more generally now starts to sit uneasily with the apt belief account of cognitive achievements in particular. Given that the latter account is meant to be motivated by appeal to the former account, this is not a happy position to be in.

Sosa takes neither option, and instead embraces the conclusion that achievements, even cognitive achievements, can be unsafe. Thus, it is open to him to argue that the agent in the barn façade case can have knowledge, even though his belief is unsafe. More generally, he writes that an apt "belief can be unsafe because the subject might too easily become disabled, or because the conditions might too easily become inappropriate." (p. 82) Presumably, the barn façade case falls under the second of these descriptions, in that it is a case in which, as it happens, the conditions are good for seeing barns on the basis of a quick glance, though they could very easily have been very poor indeed.

I do not think that this line of response is completely unsound. After all, it is not as if Sosa doesn't motivate this counterintuitive thesis, for he tells a compelling story about apt performance that supports this very line. Indeed, although I will not be discussing this here, Sosa further motivates this thesis by arguing that the knowledge that results in such cases is necessarily merely animal knowledge, rather than being full, reflective knowledge (see, e.g., pp. 108–109). That is, it is merely apt belief, and not also apt belief aptly formed. That said, I do think that holding that the agent in the barn façade case and cases like it have knowledge is an uncomfortable thesis to defend, given the strength of our intuition that knowledge is incompatible with environmental epistemic luck. Furthermore, I claim that there is a way of approaching these issues that avoids making awkward claims like this. We can bring this point into sharper relief if we consider a second fundamental problem facing Sosa's claim that knowledge is apt belief, a difficulty that is brought out most cleanly by certain cases of testimonial knowledge.

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Consider the following case, adapted from one offered by Jennifer Lackey (2007). Suppose that our hero gets off the train at an unfamiliar destination and walks up to the

[6] The *locus classicus* for discussions of safety is, of course, Sosa (1999). For further discussion of the safety principle, see Pritchard (Pritchard 2002; 2005, ch. 6; 2007a; 2007b).

first adult she meets and asks for directions. Suppose further that this person has first-hand knowledge about the area and passes accurate directions on to our hero, who subsequently gets to where she wants to go on the basis of these directions. If circumstances are normal, then our agent can gain testimony-based knowledge in this straightforward fashion. But would we also say that her cognitive success was because of *her* cognitive abilities, and thus that her belief was apt? I think not. Cases like this illustrate the extent to which one's knowledge can be social, in the sense that it depends, in substantial part, on the cognitive abilities of others. For while our hero has clearly exercised some relevant cognitive abilities in gaining this knowledge—she wouldn't have asked *anyone*, after all, or believed *anything* she was told—to a large extent she is gaining this knowledge by simply trusting the word of a knowledgeable informant. This is why if anyone is to get any credit for our hero's cognitive success, then it is either the informant, who has first-hand knowledge of the area, or else the cognitive 'whole' of our hero-guided-by-the-informant. But it is not the hero alone who is deserving of credit, since it is not because of her cognitive ability that she was cognitively successful. So if we are to allow such cases, it follows that there is sometimes a lot less to knowledge than apt belief.

It's not clear what Sosa's wants to say about this case. He argues at one point that an agent's cognitive success might only be partially creditable to the agent and yet could suffice for aptness nonetheless (p. 97). On this basis, he concludes that:

> Testimonial knowledge can therefore take the form of a belief whose correctness is attributable to a complex social competence only practically seated in the individual believer. (p. 97)

If that's right, then perhaps the right thing to say about the Lackey case is that her cognitive success is only partially creditable to her (and partially creditable to her informant), and yet is sufficiently creditable for her belief to count as aptly formed and hence knowledge.

While I'm happy to grant that in genuine cases of knowledge the cognitive success in question might be properly creditable, in part, to factors outwith the powers of the agent, I don't think this sort of line really captures what is going on in Lackey-style cases. After all, the point of such cases is not merely that the cognitive success is partially creditable to others, but rather that the extent of the trust involved means that the cognitive success is *more* creditable to factors outwith the agent than it is to the agent. Compare an analogous case in which an agent, possessing very little by way of archery-relevant abilities, is assisted by an expert archer in taking a shot and accordingly hits the target (imagine, for example, that the archer stands behind our novice and steadies her arms, helps her take aim, guides her firing arm back to the appropriate point, and so on). In such a case, we would not regard the success in question as being an apt performance on the part of the novice for the simple reason that the success is more creditable to the expert archer assisting her. So it is with the Lackey-style cases. Thus, appealing to the thought that we can allow the cognitive success to be in part creditable to factors outwith the agent does not enable us to deal with such cases.

Of course, Sosa might insist that he is happy to allow apt performance even in these cases. There is some reason to think that he might want to take this line, for he

notes elsewhere that the account he offers explains "how testimony-derived knowledge might count as apt, creditable belief, despite how little of the credit for the belief's correctness many belong to the believer individually" (p. 97). It is hard to see how such a view could be sustainable, however, for what now makes this an apt performance specifically on the part of agent at all? Furthermore, is the novice archer's analogous success to count as an apt performance on her part as well? This is clearly in conflict with intuition.

I don't doubt that there are lines of response available to Sosa on this score. However, when this objection is combined with the objection outlined above, I think the proper response is to think again about the underlying nature of the proposal. This is what I now propose to do.

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One could regard much of contemporary theorising about knowledge as falling into two general camps which each take their lead from two 'master' intuitions. On the one hand, there are those who take their lead from the master intuition that knowledge is true belief that is due to cognitive ability in some way. Those attracted to reliabilist theories, virtue epistemology, not to mention standard forms of epistemic internalism tend to fall into this camp. On the other hand, there are those who take their lead from the master intuition that knowledge excludes luck in some substantive sense. Modal epistemologists of various stripes fall into this camp, for example.

On the face of it, any account of knowledge needs to respect both intuitions, and—crucially—respect them *independently*. After all, one would antecedently think it unlikely that any purely modal anti-luck condition on knowledge could capture the idea that knowledge is due to ability any more than one would expect an ability condition on knowledge to capture the modal condition needed to exclude malignant epistemic luck. On the one hand, it certainly seems entirely possible that one's true belief could exhibit the relevant modal properties and yet fail to be such that it is the product of genuine cognitive ability. For example, just imagine a case in which the relevant modal properties are exhibited but where the reason why they are exhibited has nothing to do with the cognitive labours of the agent but reflects instead a quirk of the environment (e.g., that the relevant facts are such that they change to fit with what the agent believes). On the other hand, and we have seen one illustration of this above by considering how cognitive achievements are entirely compatible with environmental epistemic luck, we can certainly imagine cases where an agent's belief is due to *bona fide* ability and yet is subject to knowledge-undermining epistemic luck nonetheless.

Nevertheless, we epistemologists are theorists, and as theorists we aspire to simplicity. Hence the attraction of either formulating a modal anti-luck condition which can capture the ability intuition or formulating an ability condition which can capture the anti-luck condition. I think Sosa falls into the latter camp, in that he wants the sense in which knowledge is non-lucky to fall out of his account of apt belief. But this gets him into a tangle. On the one hand, he is forced to allow knowledge in cases like the barn façade case where, intuitively, there is knowledge-undermining

epistemic luck present. On the other hand, he struggles to account for the genuine knowledge present in certain testimonial cases where the agent doesn't appear to be exhibiting the requisite apt belief.

I think that the moral to be drawn from the problems facing a view like Sosa's is to recognise that our theory of knowledge must incorporate *both* an ability condition and an anti-luck condition. The view that results is what I call *anti-luck virtue epistemology*, and it holds, roughly, that knowledge is safe (i.e., non-lucky) true belief that is the product of the agent's reliable cognitive ability. Notice that such a position does not incorporate a 'because of' relation in the way that Sosa's view does. This is because the kinds of cases that seem to motivate the addition of such a clause—in particular, Gettier-style cases—are dealt with by the anti-luck condition (i.e., the safety condition). Moreover, since this relation is not added we do not face the problem of accounting for the agent's knowledge in Lackey-style cases. After all, it is not in question that the agent in this case is exercising her cognitive abilities to some substantive degree; what is at issue is just the extent to which she is properly creditable for her cognitive success.[7] Finally, notice that by incorporating an anti-luck condition one does not need to worry about how to deal with cases of environmental epistemic luck of the sort present in the barn façade case, since this is dealt with in just the same way that normal Gettier-style epistemic luck is dealt with by introducing the anti-luck (safety) condition.[8]

Of course, such a theory of knowledge is messy when compared with the wonderfully elegant view that Sosa describes. Moreover, my position does not have available to it the straightforward response to the problem of epistemic value that Sosa's view can offer.[9] Nevertheless, we are required to follow the truth wherever it may lead us, and I suggest that where the truth is leading us is towards this more complicated account of knowledge and not towards Sosa's aesthetically pleasing and subtly defended view.[10]

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[7] It should be clear from the foregoing that, unlike Lackey (2007), I do not think that innate knowledge is even possible, at least where that is construed in such a way that it involves a true belief that is not even in part the product of the agent's reliable cognitive ability.

[8] Indeed, the attractions of the view do not end there, since it can account for a lot of our other intuitions about knowledge as well. For more discussion of anti-luck virtue epistemology, see Pritchard (2008a; 2008b).

[9] That said, I think that this view can adequately account for epistemic value, albeit in a way that does not take our intuitions about the value of knowledge at face value. For more on this point, see Pritchard (2008b; forthcomingb).

[10] An earlier version of this paper formed part of a symposium on Sosa's work that featured in the 2nd Annual On-Line Philosophy Conference (OPC2). I am grateful to Adam J. Carter and Ram Neta for comments on a previous version. Special thanks go to Ernie Sosa for extensive discussion on issues relating to this paper.

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